

## Americans in Paris by Charles Glass, review

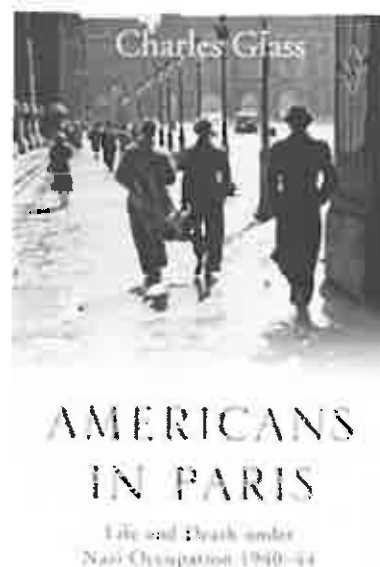
Antony Beevor is impressed by the heroes who resisted the Nazis in France, as told in rich detail by Charles Glass in 'Americans in Paris'

By Antony Beevor

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When American troops landed in Normandy in 1944, many of them were suspicious of the French. They saw little difference between an enemy-occupied country and an enemy country. Despite all the efforts of the US Army civil affairs sections to explain the realities of the situation, France remained very foreign. Battlefield myths rapidly circulated of French women acting as snipers alongside their German lovers.

The Americans who had been caught in France by the German invasion of June 1940 could hardly have been more different. They loved the country, and in those days the French themselves were pro-American. In fact the United States Ambassador William Bullitt was so trusted by the French authorities that they asked him to handle the surrender of Paris as an open city, thus effectively making him temporary mayor. The rapid deterioration of relations after the Liberation is an important subject, but outside the scope of Charles Glass's book.



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In 1940, the Americans in Paris were expatriates of varied backgrounds who had settled there for different reasons. They included writers, artists and intellectuals, black soldiers – many of them jazz players who had stayed on in Paris after the First World War to avoid racial prejudice at home – businessmen, and also a handful of American women who had married into the French aristocracy.

The most famous of the roughly 2,000 Americans in France during the war included Josephine Baker, who became a hero of the Gaullist resistance, Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas, and the bookshop owner Sylvia Beach, the great friend of Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce. Only Beach receives Glass's attention because the others left Paris. She was an extraordinary woman, who did far more for Franco-American cultural relations than any government organisation could hope to do.

Glass focuses to a large degree on a circle linked to the American Hospital and the American Library. These institutions were presided over by General Count Aldebert de Chambrun and his American wife, Clara, a

cousin of President Franklin D Roosevelt. Their son René de Chambrun was married to Josée, the daughter of Vichy's prime minister, Pierre Laval. This ultimately compromising connection was, however, an advantage during the Occupation. It helped the deeply conservative Chambruns to keep the Germans at arm's length and preserve intact both the hospital and the library, even after Hitler's declaration of war on the United States in December 1941.

Most American citizens were interned but some remained free. One of the most extraordinary was the rich efficiency expert Charles Bedaux, an American of French birth. He had been the host of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor when they married at his Château de Candé. Bedaux had fingers in every pie and exploited his American, French and German contacts quite shamelessly. His great project was to construct a pipeline across the Sahara to transport peanut oil from West Africa to the Mediterranean. He even managed to obtain supplies from the Germans, including 15,000 tons of badly needed steel.

Then, after the Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria in November 1942, he proposed the same project to the Americans. Bedaux saw nothing wrong in his actions, and he committed suicide in despair when later charged by the Americans with treason for having worked with the Germans.

A number of Americans in France worked with the Resistance, but the outstanding heroes of the story are Dr Sumner Jackson, the director of the American Hospital, his wife Touquette and their 15-year-old son Phillip. Jackson and his wife hid shot-down Allied fliers in the hospital and passed them on to French Resistance escape lines to the Pyrenees. Working for an intelligence network as well, Jackson even allowed Phillip to slip into the restricted area of Saint-Nazaire to photograph the U-Boat pens.

Less than a month before D-Day, the three were arrested and sent to concentration camps in Germany; Touquette to Ravensbruck and Sumner and Phillip to Neuengamme. On May 3, 1945, the day after the Nazi surrender in Berlin, their German guards herded thousands of prisoners on to ships in Lubeck harbour as the British Army approached. An RAF squadron, assuming that the ships were transporting German troops, attacked them. Of the 7,000 prisoners aboard the Thielbeck, only 200 survived. Phillip was one of them, but his father's body was never recovered. It was a tragic end for the man who had saved so many Allied pilots.

Despite occasional excesses of detail, *Americans in Paris* is a much richer book than its title suggests, and for anyone interested in France during this period it is a fascinating treat.

*Americans in Paris: Life and Death under Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*

by Charles Glass

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